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Draft for (George F. Kennan, Director, S/P)
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AN ESTIMATE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

The present moment, coming as it does on the heels of a Presidential election and before any of us are able to know exactly what the future is going to bring, is a good time to look back over what we have been trying to do to date and to make an estimate of some of the problems that will face the policy makers of the future. And since it is primarily the danger of war that interests us here, we may as well turn right away to our central and peremnial problems: that of Europe and Russia.

It is clear to everyone today, I think, what it is that the Russians have been trying to do in Europe since the recent war came to an end. The course of hostilities left them militarily in possession of one-half of the continent. The first surprise and disillusionment to the American public occurred when it became evident that despite the assurances given at Yalta and on many other occasions, the Kremlin leaders had no intention of allowing the countries which had come under Russian power, in the course of military developments, to regain their independence and freedom. But an even more alarming awakening occurred when it became evident that the Kremlin leaders were not satisfied even with this half of Europe; that they wanted the rest as well; that they were determined to exploit the hardship and unrest of the post-hostilities period to prevent the political and economic recovery of western Europe. In this way, capitalizing on the confusion which they were sure would result from continued economic distress, and utilizing to the

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to the full the aggressive organizational techniques of militant communism, they hoped to bring all of western Europe under their control or their dominant influence. It was true that they expected, and still today expect, to accomplish this objective by means short of war. But that did not mean that the effects of its accomplishment would be any less terrible for the victims in western Europe, or any less menacing to this country which would thereby be deprived of its most reliable friends and placed on the unfavorable side of a new world balance of power.

Ever since these basic facts were recognized in this country and accepted as a point of departure for our own conduct, our policies have been designed primarily to accomplish two objectives, matching and countering the Soviet purposes I have just mentioned. First of all, we have tried to prevent the political capture by the communists of the remainder of western Europe, that is, of the territory which lay to the west of the high water mark of the Soviet military advance in the recent war. Beyond that, and necessarily in a tentative and preliminary way, we have tried to create conditions unfavorable to the maintenance of Soviet power in eastern Europe. We have tried to put the maximum strain on the structure of relationships by which that power is maintained, and to encourage in every way the spirit of independence and freedom among the eastern European peoples, in the hope that by this means, and without resorting to the weapon of war, we would be able to maneuver the Russians gradually back out of eastern Europe behind the new borders of the

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Soviet Union, which are already overly-generous in the recognition they give to Soviet expansionist aims.

I stress this latter objective, because it has often been alleged that our policy, usually referred to in this connection as the policy of "containment", was a purely negative policy, which precluded any forward action and therefore failed to envisage any real solution of Europe's problems. That is entirely untrue. For reasons of discretion, we in this Government have had to go easy on this phase of U.S. policy in our official and semi-official statements. Soviet rule in eastern Europe is formally disguised, after all, by a series of governments which, although they are communist controlled and although they are puppet governments, have nevertheless been recognized by ourselves and maintain normal diplomatic relations with us and with other western governments. We cannot be too explicit in public statements about the breakup of Soviet power in eastern Europe without putting ourselves in the position of calling in effect for the overthrow of these governments. To do this would play directly into the hands of the communist propaganda machine all over the world. The Moscow propagandists would then, for the first time, have real grounds on which to accuse us of aggressive and improper designs against other countries and of precisely that sort of interference in the internal affairs of other countries which they like to practice themselves. They would love to get us in this position.

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Actually, it would be not only undesirable but also unnecessary for us to stress publicly, as a direct aim of U.S. policy, the overthrow of the communist governments in eastern Europe. For it is not an objective which we propose to achieve by any direct action on the part of this Government. It has been our conviction that if economic recovery could be brought about and public confidence restored in western Europe -- if western Europe, in other words, could be made the home of a vigorous, prosperous and forward-looking civilization -- the communist regime in eastern Europe, with all the misery and shabbiness and hopelessness which seems to go with communist totalitarianism everywhere, would never be able to stand the comparison, and the spectacle of a happier and more successful life just across the fence, on the same continent, would be bound in the end to have a disintegrating and eroding effect on the communist world. In this case, we think there is a good chance that the gradual breakdown of communist power in eastern Europe would occur; but meanwhile we have no need to make a gratuitous contribution to the Soviet propaganda effort by assuming responsibility for a process of disintegration which communism had brought upon itself and for which it had no one but itself to blame.

To those of us who have some personal knowledge of Russia and of the Soviet leaders, it was always clear that

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before these objectives could ever be obtained we would have to go through an extremely tense and unpleasant period. We knew that the men in the Kremlin were desperate and determined men, -- dominated by a consciousness of the natural insecurity of their own regime, -- strongly inclined, and in fact almost compelled, like most insecure dictators, to extend progressively the area of their power in order to protect it in the regions where it already existed, -- and armed with an ideology which provided both the rationalization and the propaganda weapon for this compulsion. We knew that these were men who had no concern for western values, and no concern for human life as such. We knew that they attached no importance to good relations with the western world, except possibly in so far as occasional conciliatory word might sometimes be a means of deceiving western statesmen and softening western countries up for communist purposes.

It is important to bear in mind, and particularly with regard to the Berlin situation today, that the Russian communist leaders have no stake in their relations with this country or with the other western countries short of their desire not to become involved in a shooting war at this time. I want you to understand what this means. It means that aside from that consideration of the possibility of war there is nothing in the relations between their

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country and ours for which they are really concerned. That is a great and significant difference, as compared with the normal relations between sovereign states. In our relations with the British, for example, there are a thousand things which matter to the British Government and to our own Government: the feelings of our citizens, the multitude of personal ties and interests which bind them together; the thousands of individual economic interests, and the whole accumulation of traditions and memories and associations which build up the normal historical relationship between two great peoples. For the Russian leaders, these things do not exist. There are no such balance wheels on their foreign relations. There is not even any abstract desire for what we call good relations. The Soviet leaders are uninhibited in their conduct of foreign affairs except by that one danger that if they go too far they may produce a war at a moment when they do not want it. They have made their own country immune, they think, to anything that anybody can do to them by measures short of war. That is what the iron curtain is for. They do not fear the adverse opinions of other government or ruling circles. Influential world opinion has always been adverse to them. They have thrived on this adversity; and they have built their structure of power successfully in the face of it. And as for the possible benefits which they might derive from the friendly disposition of other countries: it has been a principle of theirs to rely not on the benefits which they can hope to extend to them but rather on those which they can force people to extend to them, whether they want to or not, by pressure of fear and compulsion. They

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are like Machiavelli. They believe that a person can rule either by being loved or by being feared; but that if he has to choose between the two, it is better to be feared, because it lasts longer.

Now I have gone into what may have seemed to be a philosophic digression here only because it has a most practical and immediate bearing on the problems which face us today. I repeat: those of us who were familiar with Russian reality always knew that men of this sort would not meekly accept a frustration by this country of their objectives in Europe, and that if brought face to face with a serious prospect of such a frustration, they would not take it lying down, and would not hesitate to bring matters to a very tense pass indeed, in the hopes of thereby intimidating and scaring the western world out of its determination and its unity.

I do not mean to say that this reaction would be insincere or not serious. As I have pointed out, there is a real question whether the Soviet structure of power (and this includes possibly even the communist rule in Russia itself) could stand comparison for any length of time with a free western Europe which had found its way back to a position of relatively great prosperity and self-confidence. This is no new situation. A few days ago I was reading the letters of a westerner who travelled in Russia in 1839. "The more I see of Russia", this man wrote, "the more I understand why the Emperor forbids Russians to travel abroad, and makes his own country difficult for foreigners to visit. The political regime in Russia would not survive twenty years of free communication with the west of Europe."

On the other hand, we also knew that neither we nor

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the Europeans had any alternative but to face this unpleasant moment, if it had to come, or to permit the communist political conquest of western Europe to proceed unchecked. There was no satisfactory way in which this danger and unpleasantness could be avoided. We also knew that the Soviet leaders, however exercised they might be at encountering serious opposition where they did not expect it, basically did not want war at this time. We felt there was a good chance that when faced with the final and irrevocable evidence of western determination to see this thing through even at the cost of war, they might then decide that a temporary compromise was better than a military struggle. Because we thought they must know that another war, whatever it might do to western Europe, would be bound in the end to be little short of suicidal to the Soviet regime itself. So while we knew that there would be a terrific Soviet reaction to the course we were entering upon, we felt that the probabilities were that it would be restricted to a sort of a snarling and a baring of the fangs designed to scare us all out of this sort of a policy, and that in the end the Soviets would probably adjust themselves to the reality of a firm and determined western position.

It was with this conviction that we started out some two years ago on the first of the steps which were designed to get the Russians out of Europe. By last spring, this program had progressed more successfully, I think, than most of us had originally dared to hope. Greece and Italy had been rescued, at least temporarily, from communist control. The hold of the communists over the French labor movement had been shaken. Everywhere

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in western Europe, communist political strength was declining. And in the Balkans the first serious rift in the Soviet structure of power, namely that between Tito and the Russian dominated Cominform, was becoming apparent.

But just at that same time it seems to me that our efforts ran into two serious snags, intimately connected one with the other; and it is about these obstacles that I would like to say a few things at this point.

The first has been the failing of the nerves of a great many people in western Europe and elsewhere in the face of the growing tension, and the resulting tendency to view the conflict with the Russians over western Europe as a military rather than a political one.

Now this is a complicated matter, which is not easily understood. When this Government set out to do what it could to rescue western Europe from communism, we knew that western Europe was militarily impotent in the face of the power of the Red Army, and that this relative weakness was so great that nothing short of a tremendous new Lend Lease program, for which no one was ready, could even hope to remedy it. And we were inclined to doubt whether even such a program could do the trick: whether people were not still too far down in spirit, in morale, in health, in standard of living, to face a new and enormous effort of military preparedness at this time. We questioned whether a premature attempt at rearmament, in advance of political and economic recovery, would not simply complete the disruption of European society which the war had begun, and play directly into the hands of the communists.

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It seemed to us particularly unfortunate to make a mistake on this point because it was clear that it was by political means, not military means, that the Soviet leaders were expecting to take over western Europe. Let me make myself plain: this did not mean that the Red Army had no part to play in the operation. The Red Army was to be used as a weapon of intimidation. For this reason it had to look strong and to be strong. It might conceivably even be brought into action as a subsidiary weapon, if this were required and if the action could be localized. But it was not the Red Army which was selected to carry the ball in this play which the Kremlin quarterback had called. There are a number of good and sound reasons why the Kremlin, despite its military superiority, did not want to try to conquer Europe by military means at this time. That is the difference between Stalin and Hitler.

Putting these facts together, it seemed to most of us, a year or two ago, that if the western Europeans were to be saved at all it would be by ignoring for the time being the precariousness of their military position and concentrating on economic and political recovery and on the defeat of their own communist parties, which were working right in their own midst and which represented the Kremlin's deadliest and most serious weapon. Of course, this involved taking a chance. Of course, if the Russians attacked western Europe, they could have caused catastrophe. But we did not think such an attack was likely. To try to be prepared for it would have meant to neglect other types of defense against Russian pressures which seemed to us to be more important and urgent.

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urgent. An attempt to overcome the military vulnerability seemed exorbitant in cost and almost physically impossible. But there was a good chance that if economic and political recovery could be achieved, the military conflict might never come. It was this line of thought that led to the European recovery program. By asking the Europeans to go in for economic recovery before achieving military security, we were in effect asking them to walk a sort of tight-rope and telling them that if they concentrated on their own steps and did not keep looking down into the chasm of their own military helplessness we thought there was a good chance that they would arrive safely on the other side. And on this basis we made our economic aid available.

Now the first of the snags we have struck has been the fact that a lot of people have not been able to refrain from looking down. This applies primarily to the French and to others in western Europe. But it also applies to a lot of people here. During the last few months, these people have become so preoccupied with the military vulnerability of western Europe that they can think of little else than the questions of military defense.

This tendency conceals a number of dangers and disadvantages.

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For one thing, it causes people to slip into a series of false assumptions about the real nature of the Russian threat to Europe. There are many people, here as well as in Europe, who cannot see any difference between the Nazi and the Soviet types of aggression, and who spend their time worrying and trembling about a Soviet military attack on the west which probably no one in Moscow has thus far had any serious intention of launching. This causes them to seek salvation in those measures which are most expensive, most difficult of realization, and least applicable to the real nature of the problem confronting them, namely, in demands for hasty rearmament, and particularly foreign military assistance and alliances. It causes them to take their eye off the real ball, which is economic recovery and the liquidation of the internal communist menace. Worst of all (and this applies particularly to ourselves) it causes people to accept the theory of the inevitability of war and by framing their policies exclusively to that end, to neglect the things which would have to be done if war is to be avoided. There is no surer way to make war inevitable than to regard it as such and to act accordingly. That is what a lot of people have been doing. And the great danger of this is that in their preoccupation with military affairs, they take measures which would close the doors to any eventual peaceful solution, which would leave the Russians no way out even if they decided they wanted to get out, and which would tend eventually to make the present division of Europe insoluble by any other than military means.

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Now in saying what I have just said, I do not mean to imply that we should do nothing about the improvement of the defense capabilities of the western European powers or that we should not continue to explore vigorously and seriously the possibilities for a North Atlantic defense pact. However illogical these feelings may be--that our problem in Europe is exclusively a military one and that the way to counter it is only by military alliances and a new Lend Lease--they are widely and firmly held in a number of countries of the western European and North Atlantic areas. We have to recognize them as psychological realities even when we are not convinced of their soundness. We have to take them into account, and do what we can to meet them; otherwise the communists will take advantage of the resulting sense of insecurity and fear, and will exploit this as a means of paralyzing the economic and political recovery effort. In addition to this, we must always remember that there are real and legitimate reasons, aside from any element of panic, for a closer association of the countries of the North Atlantic area, and for a reasonable and orderly attention to the defense needs of the western European countries. But we must be careful, at the same time, to keep all this within bounds, and not to be misled--just because we have to meet irrational fears on the part of others--into taking an irrational view of our own problem.

This situation would have been complicated enough even in the best of circumstances. But it has now been further complicated by what I would call the second of the

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the great snags we have encountered: the Berlin situation. This conflict over Berlin has really brought with it a new and specific danger of war which was not there before. This is the danger not of a war planned and launched by the Russians like the Jap attack on this country in 1941. This is always a possibility; but it's not a probability. It is the danger of a war arising out of possible incidents from which neither side feels free to back down--or, which is even more probable, of a war which we ourselves might be obliged to bring on in order to break the Berlin blockade.

In the Berlin situation, the Russians have got our thumb in the door, and they are pulling for all their might. Fortunately, it is not only a one-sided proposition. While they pull, unpleasant things are happening to them as well as to us. Economic conditions are declining seriously in their own zone of Germany, under the influence of the counter-blockade. Their own political prestige, and that of their European communist stooges, is taking a terrific beating, in Germany and elsewhere. It is just possible that they will weaken before we do. A lot of our people seem to think that is what is going to happen. But so far I have not found anyone who could prove definitely that it will.

There is, of course, another possibility. This is that the Russians might be prepared to yield if they knew that the alternative was really war. To convince them of this, we would have to act as though we really meant business. We would have to go through the motions we would normally go through, if we knew that we were going

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going to war. Unless we do this, we may never know whether the Russians were bluffing or not. But the trouble is: can this country actually prepare for war on this tentative basis? I'm told by people who are supposed to know a lot about internal political matters in this country that if the American people prepare for a war, then they damn well want to fight it, and no nonsense. Besides, it is an expensive procedure, as you people know better than anyone else--and highly disruptive of the normal tenor of life in our country.

However that may be, unless the UN still cooks up some sort of a compromise or the Russians weaken in some way before we do, we ourselves will apparently have no alternative some day but to insist on a removal of the blockade, at the serious risk of military complications.

For this reason, and for the reason that incidents may easily occur when forces of conflicting great powers are operating in such close proximity to each other and in such a delicate international situation, there is a real danger of war; and we ought to be prepared for it. We would require a strong military establishment, as a matter of fact, even if the Berlin situation did not exist; for military power can exert a moral influence on our part just as it can on the part of the Russians, and we need it for the reassurance and encouragement of our friends in Europe. But the Berlin situation adds a new note of urgency, and a new time factor, which were not there before.

On the other hand, we must remember that the Berlin situation is a very special sort of thing. It is a

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freak situation, in a way. It is not typical of any of our basic problems in Europe. If it could be solved, I personally cannot see that there would be any particular danger of a Russian attack in western Europe for a long time to come.

For this reason, again, it is important for us to put Berlin, and the whole east-west conflict in Europe, into its proper perspective. Build up our military establishment as a psychological factor in the world power struggle? Yes. Prepare for possible trouble arising out of the Berlin situation? Yes. Rearm and support our allies enough to meet their reasonable needs and to steady their nerves? Yes. But don't let us forget the basic realities: that Berlin is only an episode which may well pass without bringing war; and that if it does pass, we will be right back where we were before, in a situation where the threat to western Europe is still the political threat that it has been all along, in which no one is probably going to start a war unless it is we ourselves, in which we will still be faced with the old task of maneuvering our Russian friends back where they belong by the political and economic strengthening of western Europe, and in which we will therefore need a number of open doors through which the Russians--as we hope--could finally retreat.

From these considerations you can see, I think, the principal dangers of the period on which we are entering.

The first is that because we have to go in for military preparedness, and even for military alliances, we

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we become completely pre-occupied with the military problem and forget that war is not a certainty. If we do this, we will neglect to do the things which would be necessary if there is to be a peaceful emergence from the present difficulties. We must always bear in mind that behind a great outside show of strength, the Russians are in many ways in a very weak position; and this very weakness, paradoxically enough, may make it harder than otherwise for them to retreat politically if any strong prestige issues are involved. The fellow who is closest to bankruptcy always has to put on the bravest face.

We could only too easily create situations at this time which would make it almost impossible for the Russians to "give" anywhere in Europe; because if we put them too openly on the spot they will feel that the slightest yielding would result in a regular landslide which would never stop until it had destroyed them all. And they might then see themselves forced to fight, even when they had no desire otherwise to do so. We could do this by over-emphasizing and making too deep the line of division down the center of Europe: by failing to hold open the door for ultimate settlement in Germany and central Europe, or by concluding so sweeping and far-reaching a system of military alliances as to overshadow all other issues in Europe and leave no room for any gradations of influence between the Russians and ourselves.

The other danger is that we will lose our nerve prematurely and go all or some measure of appeasement which

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which will stiffen the Russian position just when they might finally have been preparing to yield. As I have said before, since the Russians have no stake in their relations with us short of the avoidance of an undesired war, it follows that in a matter of great importance to themselves--and the Berlin situation is such a matter--they may yield only when they see that war is the alternative. In this case, it is clear that things would still have to get a lot worse before they could get any better. And whether people's nerves would stand this is a question. In this respect, we have to carry our allies, as well as ourselves. And it is amazing, and depressing, how many people still believe that somehow or other the tension could be reduced, and everything made much better, if we were to make some conciliatory gesture toward the Russians; if someone were to go to Moscow and pluck Stalin by the sleeve and say, "Please". There is of course no greater illusion than this. The Russians know this perfectly well; and they are evidently counting on this factor to win them the prizes, in the end, which other means have failed to obtain. I think this is undoubtedly the thought which lies behind Molotov's guarded reference to the Presidential election in the speech he gave two days ago in the great theater in Moscow on the occasion of the November celebration, and behind the repeated assurances recently given by Stalin and by Timoshenko, and in the Order of the Day of the Minister of the Armed Forces of the U.S.S.R., to the effect that the social forces which stand for peace are

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growing unswervingly and will not allow a new war to be imposed. That is the Moscow way of saying: "You people in the west do not dare bring this conflict to the point of war. Your own people will get scared before you reach that point; and they will make you back down and come to us for an agreement on our own terms."

You can see, gentlemen, that it is a thin line which [illegible] are going to have to tread in this [illegible], if they are going to avoid another [illegible]. It will not be easy for them, however wise and far-sighted they may be. They must not only make the right judgments, themselves. They must also carry with them public and congressional opinion in this country, as well as the governments of a number of other countries, each with its specific point of view and its own national prejudices and myopias. Even then, the accidental and the unforeseeable will no doubt rise up to confound the best-laid plans of mice and men, as they always do. And please don't think that these problems of Europe and Russia are the sum total of our foreign policy dilemmas. We have plenty of hot ones, elsewhere in the world.

In the face of these difficulties, a detached philosopher might not give us a very good chance for avoiding real trouble. But strange things have been known to happen. And who are we, in the face of the experiences of the past week, to say that theoretically unfavorable odds should be a source of discouragement?

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